



NEIGHBORS
HELPING
NEIGHBORS
SERVICE TOGETHER



SUMMIT ON
VOLUNTEERISM
A Response to
Economic Crisis

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Good morning. Thank you for having me. Thanks to the Knights for hosting this.

I'd like to give you a quick synopsis of what the National Fraternal Congress of America is. We're a trade association. We represent 73 fraternal benefit societies.

But we are a trade association. So that means I spend about half my time dealing with political issues that affect our members, about half my time running the business of the organization and about half my time worrying about what we're going to look like in five years and that latter half of my time is why I'm here today.

We represent societies from the very large members like Thrivent Financial for Lutherans and Knights of Columbus with millions and millions of members and we represent societies, several of whom I met with over the last couple days, like the Providence Association of Ukrainian Catholics. I'm sure that's a name that's always right on the tip of your tongue; 5,000 or 6,000 members. So we represent a wide, wide range of organizations.

We are unique in that we are tax exempt, non-profit organizations but we're almost -- we are self-funding. Our member societies do sell a commercial product, life insurance and annuities to their members, and the proceeds from the sales of those products fund a lot of the charitable and community service activities that we are engaged in. In addition, our members are devoted to volunteerism as was explained earlier by the Knights. They devote millions of hours each year to volunteerism.

Fraternalism has a rich history of community service and for decades the organizations grew up around ethnic, religious, gender and occupation ties. When immigrants came to the United States, there was no Social Security program. There were no social services whatsoever. So who was going to take care of those people except themselves? I mean it's an ultimate example of what's up there, neighbors helping neighbors.

As we grew up, however, some of those common bonds have eroded, particularly the ethnic ones. People have become Americanized. Some of the religious common bonds have eroded. The tradition, at least in my family, of Catholics marrying Catholics, was abandoned with this generation right here. And despite the fact that it has been abandoned and much to my grandmother's warning me that the sun would never rise again if I married a non-Catholic, it in fact still does.

So, some of those bonds have eroded. And as Carl Anderson said this morning, I thought it was rather profound, we've forgotten who our neighbors are. Some of our members, some of our member fraternal benefit societies have forgotten who our neighbors are. As a result of that and as a result of societal changes that were brought on after the Great Depression really, the fraternal system today is much smaller than it was in its heyday.



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However, and I'm absolutely convinced of this, as I sit here before you today I am absolutely convinced that we are on the cusp of a renaissance in fraternalism. We are on the cusp of a fraternal renaissance. And that renaissance is going to be driven not by who we are, whether we're Catholics or Lutherans or Ukrainians or Slovaks, or those kind of longstanding bonds. That will only be a part of it. It's going to be driven by what we do, by who we help and what our cause is. That's what's going to drive the fraternal renaissance.

The need for meaningful community service, as we've discussed many times already today has never been greater. And despite proposals on the table to dramatically expand the presence of the federal government, there are always going to be gaps and they will only be filled by people like you and me and organizations like the ones we represent. That's always going to be the case.

What do fraternalists bring to the table? People. We have millions and millions and millions of people out there who are members of our societies, some of them longstanding members, some new members. But there's a lot of people.

What do the people in the room here represent to me? Purpose. We have a lot of people who sometimes don't have the purpose they once had and they're looking for that. The people and organizations represented in this room give them that purpose and when you put people and purpose together, that is a rather powerful dynamic duo as we sit here in Gotham City. That is a rather powerful dynamic duo that can do an enormous amount of good, more good than we're doing right now. And we're doing wonderful things right now. Don't get me wrong. But we can do more and do it better.

So my purpose here today is very simple: It's to let you know who we are and what we do and to put out in front of you and to invite you to talk to the members that are here and talk to me about how we can form partnerships so that our people can be paired with your purpose and we achieve what the priest said this morning that is written in Scripture: We achieve that mission, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, doing those things that are so basic to our system. And we can do that here today, I'm absolutely convinced.

Thank you.